

Studying the
county's past
is suddenly
a growth
activity



ZACHARY KAUFMAN/The Columbian

Bernice Pluchos stands next to an exhibit of artifacts at the Two Rivers Historical Museum in Washougal.

The future of our history

By DEAN BAKER
Columbian staff writer

For decades, Vancouver's heirloom quality was ignored while the city struggled to both ignore Portland, its big sister, and yet keep up with it.

Then came the bicentennial of Lewis and Clark's expedition and Vancouver's 150th birthday.

Now history has become the city's touchstone, the key to its pride. The city's origins are celebrated through the replica Fort Vancouver and Vancouver National Historic Reserve, and the new \$12.25 million Vancouver Land Bridge, linking the reconstructed fort with the Columbia River and the old Hudson's Bay Company wharf area.

It's saluted in the many programs and displays sponsored by museums from Vancouver to Washougal to Amboy.

This area, says Superintendent Tracy Fortmann of the Fort Vancouver National Historic Site, is just as history-rich as Jamestown on the East Coast, and archaeologists and historians are

revealing more Vancouver history every day.

After thousands of years as a crossroads for American Indians, today's Vancouver was born on Jan. 23, 1857. Then, it was a town of 250, with muddy streets and a limit of two cows per household. It boasted a regiment of soldiers fresh from a fight with natives at the Cascades of the Columbia, a good settlement of American Indians, a few adventurers and Sisters of Providence in residence.

Now the city's population is 160,800, and it's rapidly becoming an urban center. Many newcomers to this city and county are surprised at this area's history, one of the most colorful in the state.

Vancouver and its environs are not just another Portland suburb.

European-Americans had a permanent settlement at Vancouver at least 20 years earlier than at Portland.

Explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark camped in only two places

in the modern-day Portland-Vancouver area; both campsites are in Clark County — at what is now Capt. William Clark Park at Cottonwood Beach in Washougal, and at Wapato Point near the Indian village of Cathlapotle near Ridgefield.

American Indians found the lowlands around modern-day Portland International Airport and the confluence of the Lake, Lewis and Columbia rivers near modern-day Ridgefield to be desirable places to live.

In recent years, the area has begun to take pride in its Chinook and Cowlitz heritage, and in other historical highlights.

For example:

■ The Chinook Tribe led an effort to build a replica plankhouse like those its ancestors used at Ridgefield.

■ The Vancouver-based Confluence Project retained noted architects Maya

continued on Page 27

LOOKING TO THE PAST

Camas-Washougal Historical Society and Two Rivers Heritage Museum, 001 16th St., Washougal. Curtis Hughey, 360-835-8742. www.ci.washougal.wa.us/attractions/heritage.htm.

Center for Columbia River History, 1109 E. Fifth St., Vancouver. Mary Wheeler, 360-258-3289. ccrh.org.

Clark County Historical Museum, 1511 Main St., Vancouver. Susan Tissot, 360-993-5679. cchmuseum.org.

Clark County Genealogical Society, 717 Grand Blvd., Vancouver, 360-750-5688. ccgs-wa.org.

Fort Vancouver National Historic Site, on Evergreen Boulevard east of Interstate 5, 360-816-6200. nps.gov/fova.

Fort Vancouver Tapestry Project, Room 218, Washington School for the Deaf, 611 Grand Blvd., Vancouver. Sherry Mowatt, 360-992-0975. fortvancouvertapestry.org.

North Clark Historical Museum, 21416 N.E. 399th St., Amboy, 360-247-5800. amboywa.com/museum.htm.

Pearson Air Museum, 1115 E. Fifth St., Vancouver, 360-694-7026. pearsonairmuseum.org.

Vancouver National Historic Reserve Trust, Gen. O.O. Howard House: 750 Anderson St., Vancouver, 360-992-1800. vnhr.org.

Confluence Project, 400 E. Evergreen Blvd., Suite 101, Vancouver. Jane Jacobson, 360-693-0123. confluenceproject.org.